

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
STATE OF MONTANA

STEVE BULLOCK
GOVERNOR



MIKE COONEY
LT. GOVERNOR

Yellowstone County Commissioners
RECEIVED

JUL 21 2016

July 24, 2016

County Commission
Powell County
201 N. Main St.
Deer Lodge, MT. 59722

County Commission
Missoula County
200 W. Broadway St.
Missoula, MT. 59802

County Commissioners
Ravalli County
1 Main Avenue South
P.O. Box 610
Choteau, MT. 59422

County Commission
Sanders County
1111 W. Main St.
Thompson Falls, MT. 59873

County Commission
Sweet Grass County
316 N. Park Avenue
Helena, MT. 59623

County Commission
Stillwater County
P.O. Box 970
400 E. 3rd Ave. N.
Columbus, MT. 59019

County Commission
Carbon County
17 W. 11th St.
Red Lodge, MT. 59068

County Commission
Yellowstone County
217 N. 27th St.
Billings, MT. 59101

County Commission
Carter County
P.O. Box 315
214 Park St.
Ekalaka, MT. 59324

Dear Commissioners:

As chairman of the Montana Governor's Drought and Water Supply Advisory Committee (DWSAC), I would like to advise you that your county was recently determined to be in a "**Drought Alert**" status, as defined by the Montana Drought Response Plan and MCA § 2-15-3308.

Based on a variety of water supply information from the National Weather Service (NWS), Natural Resources and Conservation Service (NRCS), the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), the Natural Resource Information Service (NRIS), the Farm Service Agency

(FSA), and the Montana Bureau of Mines and Geology (MBMG) it was determined that Powell, Ravalli, Missoula, Sanders, Sweet Grass, Stillwater, Carbon, Carter and Yellowstone Counties currently warrant a Drought Alert status.

Of particular concern are the impacts of increased demands on already low flows as the irrigation season continues as well as the cumulative impact of two years of low surface flows to groundwater wells in upper elevations and valley locations.

Despite mid-July rains, the previous monthly precipitation totals for your area were in the 35-43% of normal. (See NRCS SNOTEL Montana Monthly Precipitation Basin Percentage of Normal for June – July 1, 2016). A longer-timescale analysis indicates further signals for concern. From April 2015-July 2016 precipitation totals have been well below average, especially west of the Continental Divide, further implicating water supply conditions and drought potential. (See NRCS Total Precipitation Anomaly: April 2015 – June 2016, PRISM Climate Group, Oregon State University).

Shallow groundwater levels indicate drought signals as well due to early melting of snow, above average temperatures, and a really dry June. (See NASA GRACE-Based Shallow Groundwater Drought Indicator, July 11, 2016).

The two drought indices relied on in the Montana Drought Response Plan are the Palmer Drought Severity Index (PDSI) and the Surface Water Supply Index (SWSI). The PDSI indicates your areas are vulnerable to drought due to a prolonged period of abnormal dryness. In addition, the SWSI shows conditions in the -1.9 to -2.0 range, signifying that snowpack, mountain precipitation, streamflow, reservoir storage, and soil moisture conditions taken as a whole are pointing to increasingly dry conditions.

The committee's action in designating Powell, Missoula, Ravalli, Sanders, Sweet Grass, Stillwater, Carbon, Yellowstone, and Carter counties under a Drought Alert serves to heighten local awareness of water short conditions. It does not, however, carry with it any official status with respect to federal or state disaster assistance programs. The Drought Alert designation is not related the federal government's Natural Disaster Determination accessed through the USDA Secretary of Agriculture. However, this letter is being copied to your local FSA County Executive Director (CED), who may be able to initiate the research needed to request a Secretarial disaster designation.

As such, the Drought Alert designation can be helpful in documenting the eligibility for USDA and other federal relief programs. The Drought Alert status is intended to give high visibility to the continuing impacts of drought in affected areas and to prompt communication among stakeholders. The Committee encourages you to work closely with your local FSA CED to assess any impacts and make reports. In addition, you may want to contact your local Disaster Emergency Services, District Field Offices to be sure drought is part of both your pre-disaster hazard mitigation planning as well as your emergency management planning.

Unlike flooding, drought is an emergency with slow onset and recovery periods. It is important to react to water short conditions in a timely manner with plenty of forewarning so that water resources are properly conserved. If you see crops or grassy areas "brown out" it is too late. If further dry conditions persist, your counties may enter severe drought conditions warranting more drastic and immediate action. Should this occur, the DWSAC can issue a "Severe Drought" status for your counties, which will further heighten awareness at local, state and federal levels and assist in directing resources to your area.

On behalf of the Governor and the DWSAC committee, I also urge you to continue supporting your local drought resiliency efforts. Experience has shown that a local committee, conservation district, or watershed group is the best way to collectively take stock of local impacts, maintain a dialog about conditions, explore remedies, communicate concerns to the Governor's DWSAC, and access relief programs.

The committee's Internet site contains information regarding drought response and available resources: <http://nr.is.state.mt.us/drought/>. An electronic copy of The Montana Drought Response Plan can be found here:
http://drought.unl.edu/archive/plans/drought/state/MT_1995.pdf

You can contact the committee staff, Ada Montague, at (406) 444-6628 for more information. Let's hope that conditions improve in coming weeks.

Sincerely,



MIKE COONEY
Lieutenant Governor

cc: Carbon CED, P.O. Box 509, 606 W. Front St., Joliet, MT. 59041-0136
Carter CED, P.O. Box 5, 308 S. Mormon Ave., Ekalaka, MT. 59324
Yellowstone CED, 1629 Ave. D, Bldg. A, Suite 2, Billings, MT. 59102-3042
Stillwater CED, 334 North 9th St., Columbus, MT. 59019
Sweet Grass CED, P.O. Box 610, 225 Big Timber Loop Rd., Big Timber, MT. 59011
Powell CED, 1002 Hollenback Rd., Suite B, Deer Lodge, MT. 59722
Ravalli CED, 1709 North First St., Hamilton, MT. 59840-3357
Missoula CED, 3550 Mullan Rd., Suite 106, Missoula, MT. 59808-5125
Sanders CED, P.O. Box 639, 7487 MT Highway 200, Plains, MT. 59254